

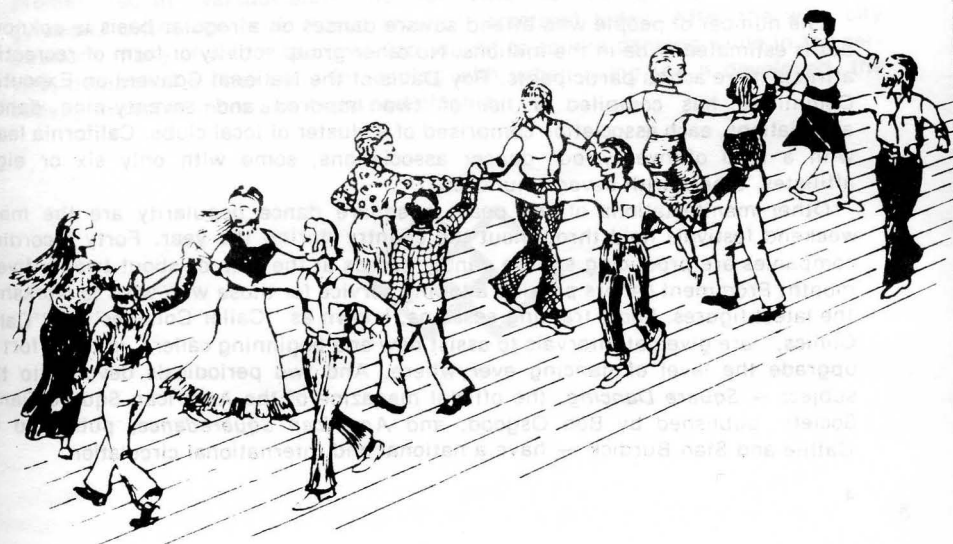
HOEDOWN HERITAGE

THE EVOLUTION OF MODERN SQUARE DANCING

by Martin Rossoff

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THE CURRENT BOOM

Every year since 1952 square dancers have gathered from all over the world to take part in their very own jubilee — the National Square Dance Convention. For three days and nights they move around the convention center, sampling the choreographic skills of the outstanding leaders in the field. A record crowd of almost forty thousand people attended the twenty-fifth annual celebration held in Anaheim, California. The affair took special significance from the fact that it had been declared an Official Bicentennial Event, climaxing a long campaign to establish square dancing as America's national folk dance.

As in the past, the program included workshops on the contra dance, clog dancing and the latest round dances. A special feature was a pageant depicting two hundred years of American dance history. But the main attraction was the presence of more than a hundred well-known callers, displaying a wide spectrum of style and talent. Dancers could choose the level most suited to their ability and experience, from "mainstream basics" to "super-challenge."

Viewed from a balcony or other vantage point, the dancers at annual festivals resemble the colored pieces tumbling inside a gigantic, revolving kaleidoscope. Dressed in flamboyant costumes, the squares coalesce, dissolve and re-group in accordance with the commands of the caller, who stands at the microphone and directs the interaction as his inspiration dictates.

The uninitiated observer or square dance traditionalist who comes upon this scene must truly be amazed. For the old familiar "forward six and back" and "take a little peek" have all but disappeared from contemporary square dancing. No longer can the dancer memorize the standard patterns, as in previous years, or anticipate what the caller will ask them to do. Instead, the caller observes the dancers as they respond to his unrehearsed directions and moves them from one configuration to another until they are all in position for a "left allemande." At that point, a new series of commands begins or the sequence ends.



The number of people who attend square dances on a regular basis is unknown but is estimated to be in the millions. No other group activity or form of recreation attracts more actual participants. Roy Davis of the National Convention Executive Committee has compiled a list of two hundred and seventy-nine dancer associations, each association comprised of a cluster of local clubs. California leads with a total of twenty-four dancer associations, some with only six or eight affiliates, others with several hundred.

Other manifestations of the peak in square dance popularity are the many weekend festivals held throughout the country during the year. Forty recording companies are producing square dance records at the rate of about twenty-five a month. Prominent callers provide a taping service for those who wish to workshop the latest figures. Short training sessions, known as "Caller Colleges" or "Caller Clinics," are given at intervals to assist new and beginning callers, in the effort to upgrade the level of dancing everywhere. And two periodicals devoted to the subject — *Square Dancing*, the official magazine of the American Square Dance Society published by Bob Osgood, and *American Squaredance*, published by Cathie and Stan Burdick — have a national and international circulation.

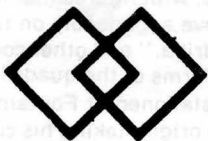
Square dance history was made in January 1977 when the newly-elected president of the United States invited the Rebel Squares of Douglas County, Georgia, to share in the inauguration festivities. Thousands gathered at the Visitors Center (formerly Union Station) and took part in what was undoubtedly the first official square dance held under presidential auspices. Although the president and Mrs. Carter were diverted to some other activity in the inaugural program, their interest in square dancing was well known.

While he was still a state senator in 1963, Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter took up square dancing under the tutelage of caller Rod Blaylock. Rod remembers (*American Squaredance*, October 1976) that the Carters had a feel for the music and enjoyed the experience. Jimmy's grin was much in evidence, "especially when he blew the call." During Carter's term as governor, he and his wife attended square dance festivals and sponsored several in the Governor's Mansion. Toward the end of his term of office, he told Rod that he looked forward to his return to Plains and to joining the nearby Crazy Eights. However, his campaign for the presidency interfered with these good intentions.

What was once billed as America's native dance has become an international pastime, with square dance clubs operating in countries all over the world. In Saigon, where square dancing was once denounced as a degrading foreign influence, several hundred club members dance to records or tapes, in the absence of a professional live caller in the area. The activity is especially popular in Japan, where the dancers may not know a word of English but can respond to the calls without faltering.



Square dancing began to take hold as a popular pastime after World War II. Until then, the traditional or so-called "eastern" square dance was the fashion. Callers could function successfully with no more than a dozen figures at their disposal. Dancers executed the "dosado" with arms folded across the chest. They promenaded in "varsouvienne" position. And the "swing" was an uninhibited gyration, unlike the brisk "once around" practiced today. After the war, city dwellers, many of whom had been introduced to square dancing while in the service, demanded a pace more in keeping with urban living. As it developed, the activity attracted more and more participants.



ORIGINS

Many attempts have been made to trace the origins of modern square dancing. S. Foster Damon, in his *History of Square Dancing* (1957) which appeared originally in the *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, notes that the great apes have been observed dancing in lines and circles, thus suggesting that the activity predates the arrival of mankind. In a section on the "Historical Background of Square Dancing" in his *Glossary of Square Dance Calls*, Lee Kopman, one of the country's most creative callers, observes that men training for military service in ancient Greece executed drills in square formation to the commands of a drill master. However, he continues, the square was always a symbol of fertility and was therefore included in many primitive, ritual dances.

Dance historians generally agree that, regardless of its ancient roots, square dancing as we know it today resulted from a blend of European dances brought to this country by the earliest immigrants. A chart prepared by Dorothy Shaw in *The Story of Square Dancing, A Family Tree* (first published in 1951 and reprinted by the American Square Dance Society in 1967) shows a dual ancestry very clearly. Apparently, the two strongest influences were the English country dance and the French quadrille. The earliest evidence of the relationship is found in John Playford's *English Dancing Master— Plain and Easy Rules for the Dancing of Country Dances, with the Tunes for Each Dance* (1651), the oldest extant handbook of English dancing.

This manual, recently re-issued by the music publisher Schott and Company of London, must have filled a great need, for it went into seventeen editions by 1728. The final edition contains the descriptions of more than nine hundred dances, including circles, squares, and "longways," the longways being the most numerous. The longways was England's most popular dance during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Later known simply as the "country dance," it was carried across the channel into France where the term was converted to "contre-danse." Eventually, it became our "contra."

The French refined the contre-danse by changing the line to a square and limiting the number of couples in a "set" to four. Ralph Page, a diligent student of early dance history, believes that the French had to modify the shape because they danced in smaller rooms that were more or less square. The English, on the other hand, could accommodate long lines in their large "assembly halls." The French originally called their squares "cotillions" (after the French word for petticoat, *cotillon*) and later "quadrilles." As adopted by the French court, the quadrille was a stately, measured dance, with figures that had to be learned and memorized. Of course, France did not have a monopoly on the quadrille. Italy had its "quadrreglia Italiana," Spain its "cuadrilla," and other countries undoubtedly had counterparts. One of the most popular forms of the quadrille was "The Lancers," named after a regiment (Les Lanciers) stationed at Fontainebleau. However, Page believes "The Lancers" to be of English origin, taking his cue from a *Dictionnaire de la Danse* (by G. Desrat) which defines "Lancier" as a "quadrille d'origine anglaise...introduit en France vers 1868." Page also notes that the Lancers can be found in other countries, in Puerto Rico as "Los Lanceros" and in Sweden as "Lancier Kadrilj." In any case, it was the Lancers which gave us the Grand Square, one of the most popular "breaks" in the square dance repertoire.

The country dance was probably brought to America by the Pilgrims. The quadrille came much later. After the Revolution, dancing masters began operating

in New England and along the Atlantic coastline. Some had been officers in the French regiments and remained in their newly adopted country for better or worse. Others were impecunious noblemen who came to the new land in the hope of recouping their fortunes. A few were Englishmen or native Americans. They established dancing schools and travelled from one part of the country to another. Some published their own instruction books. The first such manual was by a John Griffith (or Griffiths — the spelling varied), published under the title *A Collection of the Newest and Most Fashionable Country Dances and Cotillions* in 1788.



WESTWARD HO!

As taught by the "Maitres de danse," the quadrille remained more or less unchanged for more than a century. As it went westward with the pioneers, it lost its stately cadence and dignity to become a much freer and rough-and-tumble affair. It was the favorite dance and chief form of social entertainment on the frontier. While masquerade and fancy dress balls were popular in the towns and cities, the "barn dance" or "cowboy dance" was preferred in the less populated areas. Any occasion served as an excuse for a dance. Everett Dick, the author of *The Sod-House Frontier, 1854-1890* (1937), quotes from an article in the *Topeka Capital* of May 9, 1923, entitled "When Kansas Was Young":

"In the spring of 1897 I witnessed my first frontier dance. A new store building was to be dedicated with a dance. There was room for three 'sets' of four couples each to dance at once and the musician and caller was Dume Evans. Just what 'Dume' was a contraction of I never knew. His music didn't appeal much to even my unpracticed ear, but his unique and poetic improvisation as he 'called' to his own fiddling impressed me more than the movements of the dancers. When the sets were full, Dume's fiddle and his voice came into action. He always sang in a droning monotone, keeping time also with his left foot. The opening was always the same.

S'lute ye pardners.

Jine hands and circle to the left.

First couple lead to the couple on the right.

Lady in the center and three hands round;

Min' yer feet fellers, don't tromp on her gown.

First lady swing out and second lady in,

Three jine hands and circle ag'in.

On to the next couple, hoe it down;

Jine hands three and caper aroun'.

Third lady to center; give your honey a whirl,

Lead to the next with your best girl.

Grab your honeys, don't let 'em fall,

Shake your hoofs and balance all.

Ringtailed coons in the tree at play;

Grab yer partners and all run away."

In his assessment of entertainment on the western plains, Dick also refers to the singing games or play party. In communities where Methodists and other religious groups frowned on fiddle music and dancing, the play party was an acceptable substitute. In this form of recreation, the young people performed steps similar to those in the square dance but without instrumental accompaniment. Instead, they sang to provide the necessary rhythm. The play party survives today in such children's games as "Skip To My Lou," "All Around the Mulberry Bush," and "London Bridge."

FROM COUNTRY TO CITY

Had it not been for its survival in New England and in other rural areas, square dancing might have disappeared completely during the first quarter of this century. As it happened, vacationers from the city would observe the Saturday night dances in the villages and be invited to join in by the friendly natives. "Allemande" tells how he helped move square dancing from the country to the city:

"It might surprise some of you to learn that couple dancing is still frowned upon in many parts of the country. Now, Stony Creek, where I come from (in the Adirondack Mountains) has frowned very heavily upon it indeed. Only in the privacy of our own homes have we indulged in the waltz or polka or foxtrot. The only public dancing permitted has been the square dance, held at the Inn or the Grange Hall. These dances in the summer are attended by the 'city folks' who have 'gone rural' for their vacations. That's how I came to be a square dance teacher.

"To tell the truth, I started to teach the girls in self-defense. To dance twelve or fifteen 'sets' a night (each one containing three 'changes') was a fair night's work, but when you had to shove the 'dudes' (city folk to you) around all night, it became 'hard labor.' Well, I began to teach the visitors before they went to the dance and the result was much more pleasant for all concerned.

"When I came to the city, I found people had enjoyed themselves so much at the country dances that they wanted to continue them in their city homes....."

In his *Body, Boots and Britches* (1939), Harold W. Thompson pays tribute to the hospitality of the "mountaineers" in welcoming the city visitors to their social affairs. He writes:

"My children look forward to 'going up' to Big Moose in the Adirondacks every summer, partly because they can attend the 'square dances' over which Barney Lepper presides. During the day, Mr. Lepper is the courteous ticket agent at the railroad station; in the evening, he is the favorite 'prompter,' directing the quadrilles all the way from 'Join hands and circle left' to 'all promenade and I don't care.' The gods of the mountain and the gods of the plain are one when Barney Lepper 'winds the clock' or orders the dancers to 'swing your ma, now your pa; don't forget old Arkansaw.'"

Thompson also quotes from a letter he received, describing a dance held in a barn between Paradox Lake and Schroon Lake in the Adirondacks:

"We had one of the best callers in the county; somebody said he had corns in his throat, and he could certainly make himself heard above the noise of the orchestra and sometimes forty and fifty squares. The orchestra was a piano and a violin and the violinist's foot. There were some men who looked as if they'd come straight out of Hardy, and we always could do the dances when we had one of the real countrymen for a partner — their hands were as firm as if upon the plow. The Johnson Pond Breakdown was supposed to wear everyone out, and it did; it was a mental test. It begins

Right hands around to the left
I guess the other way is best.

"There was another rough one in which the girls put their arms over the men's shoulders, making two circles, one of men and one of girls, and the men circle round for God's sake and the girls prayed their arms wouldn't break...."

The figure described here is apparently a version of the dance known as "Swing Like Thunder," in which at the command "Flap those girls and go like thunder," the ladies were lifted off their feet by centrifugal force and were seriously in danger of flying out of the ring if an arm hold was loosened.



CALLS AND PATTERS

Just how the practice of calling originated is difficult to determine. Page believes that, reluctant as they were to interrupt the flow of the dance and the music, the French dancing masters were obliged to insert an occasional prompt. The commands were in French: "Grand rond a gauche" (circle to the left); "Chaine Anglaise" (right and left thru); "Chaine des Dames" (ladies' chain). When native Americans took over the direction, they employed the English equivalents. However, a few of the originals still remain: "promenade," "allemande" (a la main), and "do-sa-do" (dos a dos).

In the profile of a Westchester (New York) caller named Elisha Keeler by Robert Lewis Taylor which appeared in the *New Yorker* magazine of February 9, 1957, the author wrote that the "first prompting callers were bilingualists who were needed to stand alongside the French dancing teachers and translate their instructions into English. Certainly early New England history records that a number of professors in small college towns augmented their slender incomes by running dancing academies on the side, and since bilingualism usually implied a high degree of education, it is possible that among them were men who had qualified themselves for their secondary profession while acting as translators."

Both Page and Damon mention a travel book published in 1828 containing a reference to a ball held in Charleston, South Carolina, at which the fiddler prompted the figures. Page also refers to a violin instruction book dated 1847 which advises the "caller" to be familiar with many figures and cautions him against calling anything too complex, lest the square fall apart and set the dancers to scrambling for their original positions.

Ralph McNair, in his book *Square Dance* (1951), describes the metamorphosis of an individual from dancer into caller, a route which was followed by many of today's callers, except that a sound system has replaced the live band:

"A familiar picture is that of the man who, having been bitten by the bug, decides to become a caller. He starts out one or two nights a week at the local high school or the homes of his friends. Then, as he builds his repertoire of calls, he finds that he is in demand every night over the weekend and a night or two during the week. Next he assembles a regular group of musicians and finds a barn or a hall for his dancers. Finally, with a gigantic heave, he gives up his job and devotes his entire energies to what has become a full-time enterprise. Another caller has been born and he in turn will bring immeasurable fun to hundreds and even thousands of people."



Reconstructing the delivery and patter of the early callers is difficult since the practice of calling is a verbal art and few callers bothered to write out their routines. There was considerable borrowing and exchanging as callers travelled from place to place. The imaginative caller would insert doggerel in between his commands in order to allow time for a figure to be completed and to lend interest to the dance. Much of the patter was meaningless but occasionally it had some special significance. In the case of

"Meet your honey and pat her on the head
If she don't like biscuit, give her corn bread"

the implication was for the man to employ an arm turn or an elbow swing, if the waist swing was not permitted.

Here is how one old time caller cued his dancers to get up on the floor and arrange their squares. The selection is from "Allemand AI" Muller's *All American Square Dances* (1941). In time to the music, he would chant:

"There's the fiddle, here's the call
Up on the floor, and dance you all
Take your honey, the gal so fair
Up on the floor and form a square.
Now four more couples, four more —
Three more — two more — one more couple —
Now four more couples — one more set —
Take that gal who ain't danced yet."

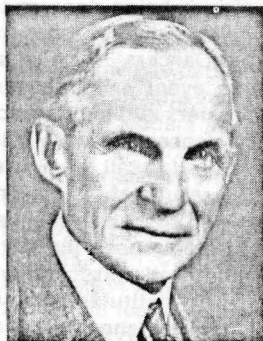
Inevitably, as the pace of square dancing increased, the use of patter declined. There simply weren't enough beats in the usual figure to permit long-winded versifying. However, rhyming is still practiced today with many of the basic calls (i.e., "bend the line, you're doin' fine"). Additional patter may accompany some of the calls like "grand right and left" and "promenade," which require even more time for execution. Here is a relic occasionally revived even today:

"Promenade with the little red wagon,
Handle's broke and the axie's draggin' "

Hundreds of rhymes and patters can be found in *Developing the Creative Square Dance Caller* (1956) by Ralph and Zora Piper. Here is a monumental compendium of more than enough verses to fit any figure and break of that era. The collection is of historic interest only to today's caller of western squares, although the material on contra calling is still usable.

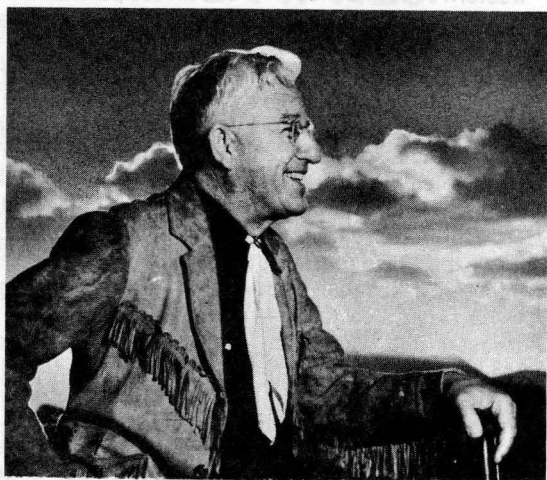


HENRY FORD AND LLOYD SHAW



Ford Motor Co.

Henry Ford



Henry Ford played a considerable role in keeping the American folk dance alive. An excellent dancer, he abhorred jazz and the popular dances of the day but had a passion for the old gavottes, reels and quadrilles which had graced his courtship period. Perhaps to counter the charge that he was an ignoramus ("History is bunk"), Ford undertook a number of historical restorations. The first of these renovations was the Wayside Inn at South Sudbury, Massachusetts, probably the oldest guest house in the country, dating to 1686 and made famous by Longfellow in his *Tales of a Wayside Inn*. Ford bought the inn in 1923. There he found an excellent caller-fiddler named Mellie Dunham in charge of the dancing. He induced Dunham to move to Greenfield Village, another of his restoration projects, in Dearborn, Michigan.

A Mr. Benjamin Lovett succeeded Dunham in Dearborn. Lovett Hall was reputedly one of the most beautiful ballrooms in the country, with teakwood floors and crystal chandeliers. When Ford issued a dance invitation, the guests were obliged to cancel all other obligations. Nor was it unusual for Ford to interrupt the office routine of any of his executives in order to demonstrate the latest dance figures. No one was admitted to Lovett Hall unless he had taken the required number of lessons from Mr. Lovett and his staff. Lovett insisted on proper styling and etiquette on the dance floor. His book *Good Morning, After A Sleep of Twenty-Five Years, Old Fashioned Dancing Is Being Revived by Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ford* (1926) contained instructions for quadrilles, lancers, squares, contras and rounds. It went through several editions, becoming a standard textbook, and was adopted by such by the New York Society for Teachers of Dancing in 1941.

A copy of the book fell in to the hands of Lloyd Shaw, of Colorado Springs, Colorado. Shaw was a prime mover in the resurrection of the old time dances during the thirties. More than any other person up to that point, he sparked an interest in square dancing which has persisted to this day. Dr. Shaw, who began his career as a physical education teacher after graduating from Colorado College, became principal of the Cheyenne Mountain School and later school superintendent. Convinced that dancing belonged in the school program, Shaw had been training an exhibition group of high school students in European and American folk dancing. It

occurred to him that a large area of American dancing was being overlooked — the western square dance. His search for printed material on the subject was fruitless. It was not even mentioned in the book by Ford and Lovett.

Quite by chance Shaw learned that "cowboy" dances were being done in the neighboring cattle towns. A local rancher and part-time caller had approached him with a request to borrow some of his "Cheyenne Mountain Dancers" for a square dance contest. When the students won first prize in the event and graciously declined to accept it, the rancher offered to teach the youngsters all the old dances with which he was familiar. Shaw then began to attend the dances that were being held in the surrounding region. He took notes and taught himself to call the figures. He acquired great proficiency as a caller and published the results of his research and experience in *Cowboy Dances* (1939), a landmark work on the western square dance as it was then performed. A striking photograph in the book shows the author in his caller's costume — cowboy hat, string tie, vest, swallow-tail coat, checkered trousers and watch fob. Shaw went on to conduct summer institutes in which teachers received training in conducting the dances. The Cheyenne Mountain Dancers toured the country, giving demonstrations which gave further impetus to the square dance movement.

Shaw was the prototype of a new breed of caller who was to appear on the scene thirty years later. Endowed with uncommon energy and enthusiasm, he could not resist the temptation to invent new patterns. Although he cautioned his students against the practice, out of fear that dancers would become discouraged if too many new ideas were introduced, he could not follow his own advice. As one of the men in his class later wrote: "In the single week that we were out there studying under him, and while lecturing to us that we should not invent new squares, he evolved three new designs himself. 'Just a little idea I had last night,' he would say after putting us through one, 'It's rough yet. Take it home, work on it a little bit and maybe it'll go.'"

(from Charley Thomas. *Twelve Home Made Square Dances*. 1948)



THE FORTIES AND FIFTIES

Several brochures and books published during the forties and fifties convey a good picture of the kind of square dances that were being done in those years. Square dancing was enjoying a spirited revival and there was a need for handbooks to assist the inexperienced dance leader. The first of these guides was a compilation assembled by the Writers' Program of the Works Progress Administration for the recreation leaders in the Chicago Park District and entitled: *The Square Dance, including Quadrilles, Novelties, and Mixers* (1940).

Ed Durlacher, who directed square dancing at the 1940 World's Fair and introduced it to thousands of people in summer programs at parks and beaches, produced *Honor Your Partner: Eighty-One American Square, Circle and Contra Dances, with Complete Instructions for Doing Them* (1949). Richard Kraus, a professor of physical education at Columbia University's Teachers College and a prominent leader in the folk and square dance movement, wrote *Square Dances of Today and How to Call and Teach Them* (1950). Gene Gowing gave up a career in the theatre to devote himself full time to teaching American folk dancing. His *Square Dancers' Guide* (1957) is a treasury of American dances, including Kentucky running sets, contras, and circle mixers, with diagrams and directions for executing each figure. There were many other similar guide books.

From these books and the recordings that were released at that time, it is possible to re-create an impression of the dancing of the period. Each dance had a specific title and a set pattern, with minor variations. There were no more than a score of calls with which a dancer had to be familiar. Most of the dances were of the "visiting couple" variety, in which the first couple executed a figure with the second couple and repeated the same movement with the third and fourth couples in turn. The action was then repeated in sequence by the other couples. The figures were either arm turns or circles, the swing, or equally simple movements. Dance lessons were superfluous. Inexperienced couples merely assumed the fourth position in the square, and, by the time it was their turn to engage in the action, they were ready.

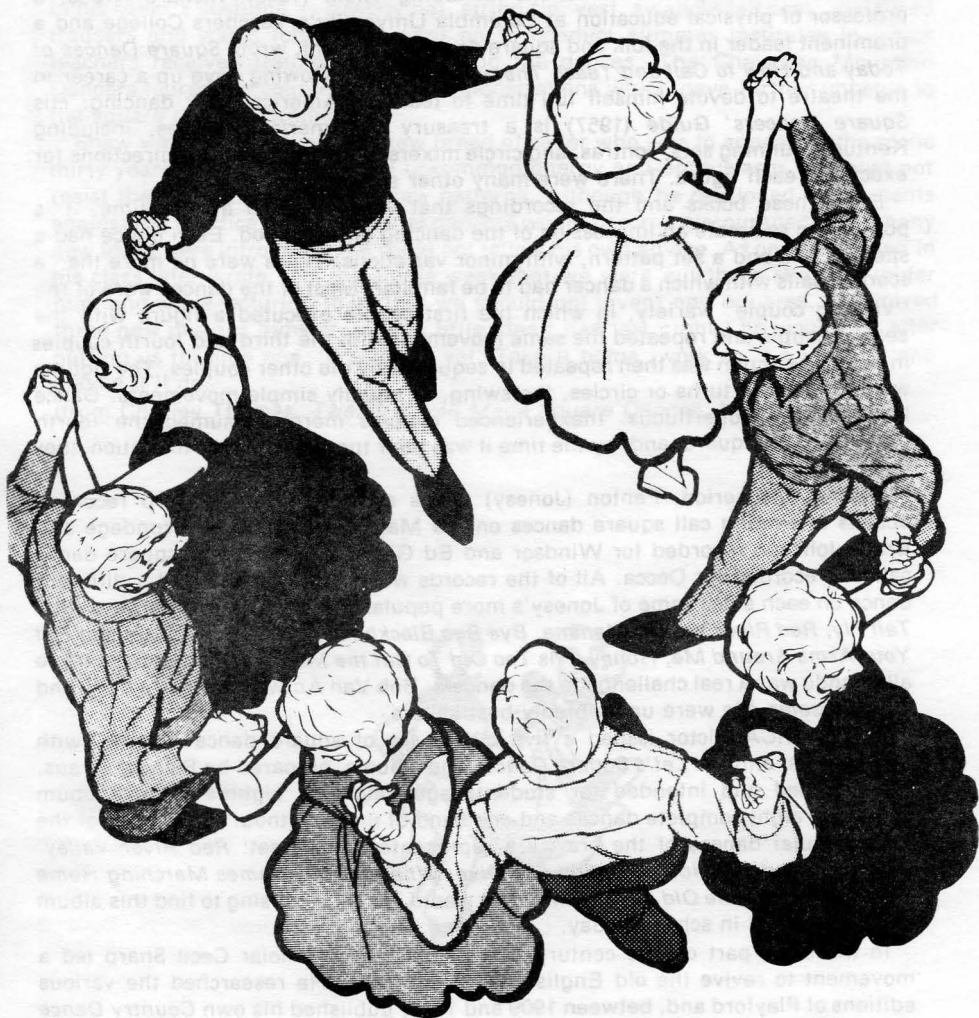
During this period, Fenton (Jonesy) Jones and Bob Van Antwerp recorded dozens of singing call square dances on the MacGregor label. Al Brundage and Bruce Johnson recorded for Windsor and Ed Gilmore (the dean of square dance callers) recorded for Decca. All of the records were 78 rpm's and had a different dance on each side. Some of Jonesy's more popular singing call records were *Blue Tail Fly*, *Red River Valley*, *Manana*, *Bye Bye Blackbird*, *If You Knew Susie* and *Put Your Arms Around Me*, *Honey*. His *Too Old To Cut the Mustard* (containing a triple allemande was a real challenge to the dancers. Bob Van Antwerp's *Pretty Baby* and *Oh Lonesome Me* were undoubtedly best sellers.

In 1956 RCA Victor issued a five album set of square dance records, with instructions, entitled *Let's Square Dance*. The albums, prepared by Richard Kraus, were graded and intended for students aged eight to eighteen. Each album contained eight complete dances and one band of music without calls. Some of the most popular dances of the era were represented in the set: *Red River Valley*, *Comin' Round the Mountain*, *Dip and Dive*, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home* and *Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight*. It would not be surprising to find this album still being used in schools today.

In the early part of this century, the British dance scholar Cecil Sharp led a movement to revive the old English country dances. He researched the various editions of Playford and, between 1909 and 1922, published his own *Country Dance Book*. In Part V of this series, he describes a dance which he observed while on a visit to this country in 1917. The dance was the Kentucky Running Set. Sharp

recognized in this dance performed by the mountain folk of Appalachia a very early English country dance. Evidently, the people of Appalachia, isolated from the rest of the country, retained without much alteration or modification the dance which had been brought over by their ancestors.

While the contra and quadrille are credited with being the main influences on the development of "eastern" or traditional square dancing, the Kentucky Running Set left its imprint on the "western" or modern square dance. Unchanged for more than a century and a half, the running set (also known as the Appalachian Mountain Dance or Big Circle Dance) still survives in Tennessee, Kentucky, West Virginia, North Carolina, and the surrounding states. It may begin as a large circle dance, employing the basic square dance figures (circle left, circle right, grand right and left, do-sa-do, swing your partner, promenade) and break up into groups of two couples, with a few more figures added (stars, ladies chain, etc.). On occasion, the caller may participate in the dance himself, calling the figures from the floor.





In the late forties and early fifties, the square dance format began to change rapidly and radically. City dwellers, tired of the monotony of the old dances, were ready for novelty and variety. Live music to support the caller gave way to recorded hoedowns, which served as a background for a whole new range of calls. Public address systems made it possible for the caller to be heard anywhere in the hall. Soon the memorized patterns of the old dances were replaced by extemporaneous variations of the traditional figures. New terminology appeared at an alarming rate, as callers vied with each other to develop new figures.

Before long, classes had to be organized so that beginners could learn the new steps. At first, a "catch-up" night in the evening before the dance began was all that was needed. Then six or eight sessions were required, then fifteen, then twenty, and soon weekly sessions over a thirty week period were a minimum. Even then, many dancers did not walk out on the dance floor with a feeling of security.

FROM TRADITIONAL TO MODERN

Formerly, dancers had to contend with only a few "set-ups" — the line, the square, the circle and the star. Today they may be placed in columns, diamonds, T-bones, triangles, blocks, hourglass shapes and other groupings. There is barely a pause between formations as the caller maneuvers his dancers like chess pieces on a huge checkerboard. The caller selects appropriate commands from any number of possibilities, depending on the position of the dancers at any given moment. Calls may be addressed to designated couples, to single dancers, to the men alone, to the women, or to all eight at once.

The modern version began in 1948 when a caller named Herb Greggerson departed from traditional routines and experimented with movements which shifted his dancers through and around each other in a series of "grids." The idea was to involve everyone in the action simultaneously. The dancers no longer had to wait their turn before executing a figure. Joe Lewis, a caller with a fine singing voice who accompanied himself on the accordion, incorporated the idea of moving all the dancers simultaneously in the classic *Alabama Jubilee*.

Callers had been experimenting with a few non-traditional figures even before this time. One of the most successful innovations and a standby in contemporary calling is the "allemande star," developed by Lloyd Shaw in 1938. (*Square Dancing* magazine in its June 1976 issue places this call in the early 1950's and attributes it to Jack Hoheisel.) Demonstrated at an international folk dance festival in Chicago, it met with considerable resistance when brought back home by callers who attended the festival. In 1941, a lady in Texas named Pat Lewkowicz, working with a set of teacups as props, invented the very popular "teacup chain." Intended as a showpiece for a one-time demonstration, the teacup chain has become a regular feature at square dances today.

Other calls originated by accident rather than by design. Bob Hall of Glendale, California, produced a record (*Riptide*) in 1949 on which he asked his dancers to "dosado" and, to give them more time to complete the figure, added a bit of patter "and like an ocean wave hang on tight." Influenced perhaps by the singing call square dance entitled *Life on the Ocean Wave*, he unconsciously gave birth to one of today's most frequently used set-ups — the "ocean wave." (This bit of information comes from one of Paul Hartman's articles on the hows and whys of new basics which appeared in the May 1975 issue of *American Squaredance* magazine.)

Here is a chronology adapted from *Instant Hash*, a text for callers, published in 1961 by Rickey Holden and Lloyd Litman. The list is a key to the year in which each of the calls named was introduced:

1940 — cross trail	1954 — U-turn back
1941 — pass thru; teacup chain	1955 — half breed thru
1942 — inside out, outside in	1956 — double pass thru
1945 — triple allemande	1957 — bend the line; Dixie style; square thru; eight chain thru; Dixie grand
1948 — around one	1958 — those who can
1949 — alamo ring; grand sashay	1959 — pair off; shuffle the deck
1950 — wheel around; rollaway	1960 — star thru; wheel and deal
1952 — courtesy turn; daisy chain	
1953 — California twirl	

Holden and Litman recall an early attempt at hash during a 1947 festival in Sacramento when the caller asked the visiting couples to execute a different figure when it became their turn — one would do "take a little peek," the next would do "dip and dive," etc. — this departure was considered "awfully clever." According to these two authors, after Shaw had created the "allemande thar," variations followed in rapid succession — "allemande O," "go red hot," and "throw in the clutch." The term applied by them to these breaks was "gearshift" or "clutch hash." Greggerson's "split the ring and around one" was termed "goalpost hash," since only two couples were active while the other two remained stationary "goal posts."

One of the most successful and influential creators of new dance ideas was Les Gotcher. His "hash" calling during the sixties set a high standard for the new style. As indicated above, "hash" (earlier called "chop suey," "succotash," or "scrambled eggs") originated when callers began putting bits and pieces of the old time dances together. Eventually, it became a method of combining sequences of calls in such a way as to group the dancers into and out of the various formations. Gotcher wrote many of the experimental figures which have since become standard — "wheel and deal," "star thru," "curlique," and "substitute," to name only a few. He was also the first caller to distribute a tip sheet service for other callers. By this time, many callers had turned professional and Gotcher's notes served as a timely clearing house.

As more and more movements were invented. Bill Burleson was inspired to compile an *Encyclopedia of Square Dancing*. An indefatigable lexicographer of square dance terms, Burleson has collected and defined over two thousand calls in his compendium and issued a supplement three times a year. The number of new calls has grown at such an exponential rate that many dancers have given up in resentment and frustration. A great debate has arisen between advocates of square dancing as a joyful recreation and those who argue that the activity cannot remain static. The latter insist that the challenge of new calls provides an added dimension. The excitement of fresh ideas keeps the dancers on their toes. The others deem it unreasonable to expect dancers to rehearse several times a week in order to master the new figures only to find a few weeks later that they were already obsolete.

In 1967, the American Square Dance Society, aware of a serious dropout rate, requested a group of callers to formulate a set of foundation calls which would be standard for all clubs. A list of fifty "basics" was then released, along with manuals for the caller and handbooks for the dancer. In 1970, the society sponsored the adoption of twenty-five more "extended basics" and in 1974 added ten more to the list. In the meantime, the callers themselves had become concerned over the loss in attendance. Fourteen callers, who had been named to a Square Dance Callers Hall of Fame, met and organized Callerlab, a nucleus which eventually activated an International Association of Square Dance Callers.

This association held its first convention in 1974. It endorsed the program of standardization formulated by the Square Dance Society and agreed that no more than two new calls would be stressed in club programs during a three month period. A committee, with Jack Lasry of Miami, Florida, as its chairman, was appointed to screen the new movements and to select the two which they found most acceptable for each quarter. Callers were not discouraged from experimenting with other movements. At the 1975 convention, another committee, headed by Lee Kopman, of Wantagh, New York, was charged with the task of identifying and defining the various plateaus of square dancing: mainstream, advanced, challenge, and the like.

MAINSTREAM AND CHALLENGE

A major decision at the 1975 conference was the adoption of a new set of basics for club level dancing to be used on a trial basis for one year. This list (the *Callerlab Mainstream Basics*) was intended to supersede the earlier *50 Basics* and *Extended 75* prepared by the American Square Dance Society. Instead of listing the calls individually, as had been done before, Callerlab arranged the calls by family. Sixty-eight families were identified, with approximately a hundred and ten individual movements named.

This tentative program, with a few minor adjustments, received complete approval at the 1976 Callerlab Convention. The suggestion was made that these calls be taught over a forty-one week period, rather than in thirty weeks, as was the practice in previous years. The new formulation is divided into three categories. Thirteen weeks was the suggested teaching period for each category. The final two weeks are reserved for review.

The 1976 convention also voted to retain for mainstream dancing six of the quarterly movements which had been proposed during the year. These were "recycle," "walk and dodge," "coordinate," "half tag, trade and roll," "ferris wheel," and "pass the ocean." Two other calls were removed from "mainstream" and placed in the advanced category: "lockit" and "transfer the column." Since then others have been proposed: "chase," "track two," "roll," "touch," and, for the first quarter of 1977, "extend the tag."

Lee Kopman is responsible for more new ideas in today's square dance choreography than any other single caller. Sometimes referred to as a "caller's caller" and a "master of challenge," he is the author (among others) of "coordinate," "chase," and "roll" in the mainstream list. "lockit" and "transfer the column" were also his inventions, as well as dozens of figures in the advanced category, including the currently popular "chain reaction," "ah so," and "shakedown." Don Beck gets the credit for "ferris wheel," Dick Bayer for "track two," and Jimmy Davis for "extend."

At the 1976 conference, the concept known as All Positional Dancing received considerable attention. The idea is not a new one. It merely exchanges the normal positions for the men and the women. It can be used with simple basics as well as the more advanced movements. Thus it provides an element of challenge on all levels without introducing any new figures. "Arky" style dancing is one form of APD. At this same meeting, Callerlab approved fifteen other calls for one plateau above mainstream, tentatively entitled "Mainstream Plus."

Another major effort toward standardization and increased enjoyment for the square dancer is the project LEGACY. The idea originated with three noted editors of square dance journals. In 1972 Charlie Baldwin of the *New England Caller*, Stan Burdick of *American Sqauredance* and Bob Osgood of *Sets In Order* (now *Square Dancing*) met in New York to devise some method of dealing with the problems which troubled the square dance world. Their plan called for an assembly of representatives from every sector of the square dance movement to meet every two years. These sessions would define the problems and hammer out possible solutions and suggestions for their implementation.

LEGACY I was held in May 1973. More than eighty "trustees" attended, representing callers, round dance teachers, record companies, suppliers, publications, and other special interest groups. They developed recommendations relating to square dance dress, manners, leadership, publicity, heritage, financial

matters, and new calls. LEGACY II in May 1975 appaudded the objectives and achievements of Callerlab. Record producers agreed to coordinate their output so that duplication of music and dances would be avoided. Recognition was given to rounds and contras as essential elements in the American square dance scene. LEGACY III is scheduled for May 1977.

At a typical club dance today, the program consists of a series of "tips." Each tip is comprised of a hash call and a singing call. In the hash segment, the caller harmonizes his chanting to the melody or chordal structure of a recorded hoedown. Some of the hoedowns have tunes which date back a century or more. Others are based on contemporary pop tunes or country music hits. Rock music and even spirituals have been used occasionally for this purpose.

The singing call provides a measure of relief from the drill-like character of the hash. Derived from the traditional square dance format, it is a "change partner" dance. The imaginative and skillful caller adapts the instrumental (flip) side of the singing call record to meet the needs of his group — simplifying the figure for beginners and inserting more complex movements for his advanced level dancers. Some callers are adept enough at this technique to provide a different figure for each of the four "changes."

Round dances are offered in between tips for added interest. Just how much of the available dance time should be devoted to rounds is a subject currently being argued. Considerable antagonism is aroused when more time is given to rounds than to square dancing itself. At challenge level dances, the rounds are usually omitted.

There is ordinarily enough variety in the club program to satisfy the average square dancer. Those who feel they have outgrown club level choreography have the option of joining a challenge group, if there is one in their vicinity. If a caller is unavailable, the dancers may subscribe to a challenge level tape service or use some of the new workshop records that are currently appearing on the market. Not all callers have the ability to call challenge dances, although a few attempt to do so by increasing the tempo, in the mistaken belief that speed alone constitutes challenge. Only dancers who are willing to devote one or more evenings a week in preparation and rehearsal can be happy in challenge square dancing.

Whatever their preference, square dancers are involved in a form of recreation which offers enjoyment and healthful exercise. For the novice, it is an exhilarating experience which grows more pleasurable as he gains proficiency and experience. It has a special appeal for those who have no talent for other kinds of dancing. Men who feel inept on the social dance floor find a welcome alternative in square dancing. The activity has developed an especially large following in retirement communities. Some square dancers will travel for miles to test the versatility of a visiting caller. Wherever they go, they are assured a warm welcome. Social and economic distinctions disappear. In the world of the square dancer, it is the dance that matters. Successfully performed, it offers just the right mixture of shared excitement and satisfaction.



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